



GOOD FOR THE SOUL

THE EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

July 26, 2020

North Congregational Church

New Hartford, Connecticut

WORSHIP FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST TIME
THAT WE ARE NOT GATHERING IN OUR SANCTUARY
BECAUSE WE WISH TO HONOR THE GOVERNOR'S REQUEST FOR
PHYSICAL DISTANCING IN ORDER TO PREVENT THE SPREAD
OF THE CORONAVIRUS THAT IS TRAVELING AROUND THE GLOBE

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FOR YOUR MEDITATION

To confess your sins to God is not to tell [God] anything [God] doesn't already know. Until you confess them, however, they are the abyss between you. When you confess them, they become the bridge.

- Frederick Buechner, (b.1926), ordained Presbyterian pastor and author

It does not spoil your happiness to confess your sin. The unhappiness is in not making the confession.

- Charles Spurgeon, (1834-1892) English Reformed Baptist preacher

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THE PEACE OF CHRIST

It is normally our custom when we gather to extend the Peace of Christ to one another. Even though we are physically apart at this time, may you know that peace.

INVITATION TO WORSHIP

Come to the fount of all goodness, wisdom and love.

Here in worship, we have nothing to fear.
We are free to be ourselves, to let down our guard and search our souls.
Let us come into the presence God whose love surrounds us, heals us, transforms us,
grants us new insights, direction and even surprises.

MUSICAL INVITATION TO WORSHIP

Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing
The Mormon Tabernacle Choir
<https://youtu.be/gPKpkrqBwNs>

Tune: NETTLETON

SCRIPTURE LESSONS

Psalm 51: 1-3, 10

1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

Ephesians 4: 29, 31-32

29 Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. 31 Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice,

32 and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

Matthew 6: 12

[Jesus taught us to pray...] ...And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

MORNING MESSAGE

“Good for the Soul”

The Rev. Marcia Lynn Cox

Confession: What are your understandings of this traditional Christian discipline? How often do you bring your shortcomings, your lapses, your---dare I say--sins before God? How do you feel when you think about confession...frightened, ashamed, likely unenthusiastic?

Perhaps you don't think you don't have much to confess. It has certainly been a little

easier to stay out of trouble in these last several months, hasn't it... being quarantined, wearing masks and keeping six feet away from most people. □

Four Sundays ago I had the privilege of reflecting on the matter of prayer: what its purposes are, whether or not God grants us all of our needs and desires, how it changes us and what we might rightly ask. In order to consider that last question, I turned to the The Lord's Prayer, the prayer according to the gospels of Matthew and Luke that Jesus taught, the prayer we say together at every worship service. So I thought it would be good this summer to reflect on the things that Jesus told us to ask for in that prayer. Two weeks ago we considered the phrase, "On earth as it is heaven," and imagined what it would be like to bring heaven to earth. Last week, and this week, we come to these words, "Forgive us our sins (trespasses, debts) as we forgive those who sin against us." Last Sunday I offered some thoughts about forgiveness and this week, in light of a Jesus' instruction for us to be both forgiving and forgiven, we consider the importance of confession.

When I look around, I don't see that the practice of confession is very common. How often do we find national leaders, public figures, or most people in general, admitting to wrongdoing, let alone being sorry or apologizing? It doesn't seem to be a popular thing to do. Even in our Protestant tradition, I am sad to note, confession it is not emphasized. One of the reasons, I think, is because we regard it as a private matter, between each individual and God. Unlike our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters, we are not required to take our transgressions to a priest who is given the power to absolve us. But since confession is a sacrament in the Roman Catholic faith, it is a sacred and necessary practice. The high regard in which it held should inspire us to engage in it it more frequently, whether privately or in the company of a trusted counselor.

The approach to confession (called The Sacrament of Reconciliation) from the Roman Catholic perspective I find to be quite helpful, challenging and profound. Forgive the long quote but I invite you to consider this guidance, whether confession is a common habit for you, or whether we know that you might need to engage in it more often:

“Before Confession

Be truly sorry for your sins. The essential act of Penance, on the part of the penitent, is contrition, a clear and decisive rejection of the sin committed, together with a resolution not to commit it again, out of the love one has for God and which is reborn with repentance. The resolution to avoid committing these sins in the future (amendment) is a sure sign that your sorrow is genuine and authentic. This does not mean that a promise never to fall again into sin is necessary. A resolution to try to avoid the near occasions of sin suffices for true repentance. God's grace in cooperation with the intention to rectify your life will give you the strength to resist and overcome temptation in the future.

Examination of Conscience

Before going to Confession you should make a review of mortal (grave and deliberate) and venial (less serious and without full knowledge) sins since your last sacramental confession, and should express sorrow for sins, hatred for sins and a firm resolution not to sin again.

A helpful pattern for examination of conscience is to review the Commandments of God and the Precepts of the Church:

1. Have God and the pursuit of sanctity in Christ been the goal of my life?...
2. Have I avoided the profane use of God's name in my speech? Have I broken a solemn vow or promise?
3. Have I honored every Sunday by avoiding unnecessary work, celebrating the Mass (also holy days)? Was I inattentive at, or unnecessarily late for Mass, or did I leave early? Have I neglected prayer for a long time?
4. Have I shown Christlike respect to parents, spouse, and family members, legitimate authorities? Have I been attentive to the religious education and formation of my children?
5. Have I cared for the bodily health and safety of myself and all others? Did I abuse drugs or alcohol? ...
6. Was I impatient, angry, envious, proud, jealous, revengeful, lazy? Have I forgiven others?
7. Have I been just in my responsibilities to employer and employees? Have I discriminated against others because of race or other reasons?

8. Have I been chaste in thought and word?...
9. Have I stolen anything from another, from my employer, from government? If so, am I ready to repay it? Did I fulfill my contracts? Did I rashly gamble...?
10. Have I spoken ill of any other person? Have I always told the truth? Have I kept secrets and confidences?
11. Have I permitted sexual thoughts about someone to whom I am not married?
12. Have I desired what belongs to other people? Have I wished ill on another?
13. Have I been faithful to sacramental living (Holy Communion and Penance)?
14. Have I helped make my parish community stronger and holier? Have I contributed to the support of the Church?
15. Have I done penance by abstaining and fasting on obligatory days? Have I fasted before receiving communion?
16. Have I been mindful of the poor? Do I accept God's will for me?"

Confession “is a powerful help to get rid of our weaknesses, grow in holiness, and lead a balanced and virtuous life.” (catholic.org)

Articulating our “sins” is the first stage in making things right. But a next and important step is to be in conversation with the person we have hurt or offended in order to offer apologies and to make amends. If it is not a person we have harmed, we need to find a way to repair any harm or injury we have done.

While confession may not be pleasant, and may actually be painful, its purpose is for us to reconcile ourselves to God, our neighbor and to our better natures. As the saying goes, it is a good for the soul.

If you are attentive to the news you know that John Lewis, a respected member of the House of Representatives, died on July 17. Known as “the conscience of Congress” he, who knew The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was regarded as a civil rights legend in his own right for leading the Freedom Rides and the Selma to Montgomery marches.

In February 2015 he recalled his first meeting with King during a conversation with Labor Secretary Thomas Perez that the department held as one of its black history month events. At that event he also told the story of a reconciliation he experienced that involved both confession and forgiveness.

“‘Back in 1961, the same year that President Obama was born, black and white people could not board a Greyhound bus ... and be seated together,’ Lewis recalled, speaking of the segregation that led to the Freedom Rides. ‘In South Carolina, in a little town called Rock Hill ... my seatmate — a young white gentleman — and two of us tried to enter the so-called white waiting room. We were attacked by the Klan, beaten and left in a pool of blood.’

Those beatings left Lewis and other Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee leaders with whom he was traveling badly bruised, but the Freedom Rides pressed on....

‘Several years later, in 2009, one of the guys that beat us came to my office on Capitol Hill, with his son, he was in his 70s, his son was in his 40s, and said ‘Mr. Lewis, I’m one of the people that beat you. I want to apologize, will you forgive me?’ Elwin Wilson asked.

‘His son started crying. He started crying. And I said, ‘I forgive you,’ Lewis said....

‘That is the power and the discipline of nonviolence,’ Lewis said. ‘To have the capacity to forgive and move on.’”

(“John Lewis recalls first meeting MLK and an apology from a Klansman,” Wesley Lowery, The Washington Post, Feb. 27, 2015)

(Take a moment to watch the video of their remarkable meeting:

<https://youtu.be/Y77fUFUfk9I>)

Friends in Christ, confession can be painful but in the end it enables us to be reconciled to and at peace with God, with our fellow creatures and ourselves. May you know the necessity, privilege and joy of this spiritual practice. AMEN.

MUSICAL REFLECTION *Change My Heart, O God* Tune: CHANGE MY HEART

The First Baptist Church, Wilmington, North Carolina
<https://youtu.be/CZN7mXBwy7Q>

PRAYER

Gracious and loving God, we come to you this day, acknowledging you as the Source of our being and the sustainer of our lives. You know us from the marrow of our bones to the far reaches of our imaginations. You are acquainted with our good intentions and

deeds as well as our shortcomings and sins. We know in the depths of our hearts that our wholeness depends on our truthfulness and authenticity. Grant that we may come to see that there is no health, no grace or forgiveness if we are not perfectly honest with ourselves, with our neighbors and with you. Lead us in the ways of openness and humility.

Forgive us if we complain or become impatient with our current circumstances during our encounters with physical distancing and separation from people and things we love. Continue to help us to understand that these sacrifices are for the common good. While we may be inconvenienced and challenged in certain ways, we are grateful for all of the medical professionals, public servants and all of those who have jobs that make our lives easier, and even endanger their lives during this time. We are especially mindful of those who are suffering from this virus and those who have contracted it while attending to them.

We pray for healing everywhere, not only for ourselves but for all who suffer...
-from violence and injustice,
poverty and prejudice.
and lack of belonging or purpose,
-from diseases of the body, mind and spirit, and those who love and care for them.

We pray:
-for those facing death and those who minister to them,
-for those who are grieving the loss of loved ones and people who served the community and the common good.

In our own lives, we bring to you now our joys and concerns....

All these things we offer, using the words of the prayer that Jesus taught us,
Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN

I Need Thee Every Hour

Tune: NEED

Female Choir, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

<https://youtu.be/XO-I8XgU5ac>

OUR COMMON COMMISSION

Let us now forth into the world in peace.

Being of good courage.

Holding fast to that which is good.

Rendering to no one evil for evil.

Strengthening the fainthearted.

Supporting the weak.

Helping the afflicted.

Honoring all persons.

Loving and serving the Lord,

And rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

BENEDICTION

May you enjoy the privilege of opening your heart to God
to share your joys, challenges, sorrows and shortcomings.

And may you the liberation of being forgiven and
reconciled to God and your fellow travelers on this earth,

As you seek to grow into the likeness of Christ day by day. AMEN.

OFFERING

Although we are not gathering in the sanctuary for worship on Sundays for the time being, the church continues to have expenses. So it would be most appreciated if pledges and offerings could be mailed to the church at P.O. Box 307, New Hartford, CT 06057. Thank you for your generosity.